

BULGARIA

A LECTURE ON BULGARIA DELIVERED
BEFORE THE SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY
IN PARIS, MARCH 14, 1917

BY

GEORGE BOUSQUET

HONORARY STATE COUNSELLOR



Bulgaria.

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Ladies and Gentlemen!

Programmes arranged by learned societies sometimes bring about painful exigencies. Did it occur to our eminent secretary, when he proposed to put on the programme for this session the Balkan region, that an evening would come, when he would have to inflict on this select audience, all thrilling with patriotism, the mortification to hear, for three quarters of an hour, a detailed description of a detested enemy and impose on an aged colleague, who, however, has never done him any harm, the ungrateful task of drawing this portrait? He is my witness that I would have wished to withhold from my lips and especially from yours this bitter cup! But the programme is made, it commands, we must obey.

We have, indeed, paid very dearly for our neglect to look into what has been done by our neighbors, and for not overcoming a certain repugnance to go and see for ourselves. The patience, the sang-froid, the sincerity of these investigations ought to become for us, humble civilians, for us, aged men leaning over the ramparts of Troy, one of the forms of patriotism, as are for our heroic soldiers, the pa-

tience, the self-mastery and the unfaltering endurance by which far better than by their courage, they have astonished the world and won its admiration.

It is not of yesterday that the name Bulgarian calls forth, in the European who pronounces or hears it, an antipathetic *grimace*. An awkward (and let us say it presently) unjust destiny has ordered that the Bulgarian people, relegated to the other end of the continent, should manifest itself to us only by its convulsions and its clenched fist. Without going back to Orpheus, whom the Thracian women, the great grand-mothers of the present Bulgarian ladies, treated very badly, the misfortune of the Bulgarians was, that for centuries they had to struggle against the Byzantine Greeks, and, inasmuch as the latter wrote the historical annals, you can imagine how partially the descendants of Herodotus and Polybius described their adversaries! Their direct contacts were not more fortunate. The famished bands of Gautier the Pennyless, who on their way to Jerusalem, try to force a passage through Bulgaria and get badly handled, then the knights of Balduin II, Latin Emperor of Constantinople, who near Adrianople were drawn into an ambushade by the Bulgarian Tsar Kaloyan and were all slain to the last man (Balduin himself disappears in the *mêlée*, and I was shown in Tirnovo the steep rock from which, it is said, he was precipitated in the river Yantra); later at the battle of Nikopolis the French chivalry landed on Bulgarian soil only to get crushed by Sultan Bayazet. Worse than all this, in the XIth century the heresy of the Bogomiles, born in Armenia, carried into Italy and France, introduced in our language the ill-fated name of Boulgres, by which was designated in the ecclesiastical code the monstrous crime of *Boulgrerie*, of which these heretics were accused. The name was odious. Voltaire ridicules it. Everybody knows the sinister adventures of Candide, of the illustrious Cunegonde and Pemglass

among the Bulgarians, and for a long time it was all that an average French Bachelor of Arts and perhaps even many an academician felt bound to know in regard to this people, who for five centuries kept Byzantium in check and played the counter part of what is poetically styled the Byzantine epos, and whom a tragic whim of destiny was to prepare to play a capital and perhaps a decisive part in the vaster and bloodier historical conflict.

We are bound to-day to examine this people more closely.

I have lived ten years in Bulgaria — from 1902 to 1912, my work allowing me perfect independence of mind and heart. I have learned the language of the people, I have traversed their towns and villages, keeping my eyes wide open; and it is the impressions thus gathered that I would try to give you in brief, if we detach ourselves as much as possible, from the present situation.

Let us first of all, cast a rapid historical glance. However dry this study may be, it is indispensable for all who would fain understand the claims of the various Balkan countries, all of which find in the past the source of their ethnical aspirations and have to look in the palimpsests for the title deeds of their nationalities inextricably mixed up by the Turkish régime. Be not troubled, however. My object is not to follow step by step the history of the Bulgarian people, but to get out of it just what is most important for us to know.

Three superimposed races; at the outset the Thracian tribes, vaunted by Herodotus, subjugated or rather thrust back in their mountains by Alexander the Great. From these hardy Thracians the Macedonian phalanx was recruited, and later on they furnished the gladiators of the circus. (Ethnographers pretend to find their direct descendants in the so called Shops, Bulgarian peasants in the district of Sofia.) At the

time of Justinian, a vast immigration of Slavs, who settled down without violence, took place. In the IXth century a more brutal invasion of a Tartar-Finish people, came from the banks of the Volga, the Bulgarians, who, less numerous but energetic, act in the same manner as the Norman conquerors in Great Britain, give their name to the country, adopt its language, forget their own, and found an autocratic and feudal empire, more feudal than autocratic, more anarchical than feudal, christianized soon. These people begin a struggle with Byzantium, and for five centuries they maintain their ground, in the midst of tragical alternatives. The dominating feature of these struggles is that the Bulgarians are hard pressed between the Danube bordered by indomitable tribes and the Rhodopes mountains. The Serbians and the Hungarians, bar them any access to the Adriatic, the Greeks prevent their approach to the Aegean Sea. It is for the purpose of conquering now one, now the other of these outlets, that the Bulgarians wage war every time, and settle down south of the Rhodope mountains.

Let us keep this peculiarity in mind. It will enable us to account for the present policy of the Bulgarians.

Finally the Byzantine Greeks, in order to get rid of these troublesome enemies, often subjugated but as often rebellious, call the Turks to help them. The Bulgarian empire succumbs half a century before the capture of Constantinople. Then comes the full installation of the power of the Sultans. The feudal régime of the boyards had prepared the way for the foreign servitude; itself gets submerged without leaving any trace. Bulgaria falls into a lethargy for 400 years groaning under the exactions of the pashas and the still more perfidious intrigues of the Phanariote clergy and the Greek patriarchate, which tries to stifle all national traditions and to maintain the people in ignorance of their own history.

However, wise and pious monks copy and preserve the archives of the politically fallen people, in their cells in the monastery of Rilo and of Mount Athos. There, in the day of national revival, the patriots will go to look for them. When it finds itself once more in 1872, the Bulgarian nation is weak to free itself by its own powers from the Ottoman yoke. Great Russia intervenes. She hastens to the rescue of the Slav brothers. And then, she herself is stifled, and strives to open the way through that country to the Mediterranean, to the open sea; the Turkish armies are beaten in two memorable campaigns, and it is at San Stefano, at the gates of Constantinople, that the Grand Duke Constantine dictates the treaty, which reconstitutes Great Bulgaria, such as she was in the historical times of Tsar Samuel, extending from the Danube to the Aegean Sea and from the Black Sea to the borders of Serbia and Albania.

Happy Bulgaria! happy Europe too, if the European Powers had adhered to that treaty, and had allowed the Bulgarian people to normally develop itself in this large territory, which was their historical boundary, watered with the blood of their ancestors and peopled by their children! We would have been spared many convulsions, and the present conflict would probably not have arisen, at any rate, not in its actual form and extent. But the evil genius of the XIXth century was on the wake. Bismarck was able to persuade Europe that this Bulgarian reconstitution was nothing but a Russian aggrandisement threatening the European equilibrium; he succeeded to persuade even Russia that in creating at her door a young and powerful empire she was eventually preparing a dangerous support for the enemies who might wish to attack her on that side; and the Berlin Treaty, in 1880, destroying the logical and harmonious work of San Stefano, divided Bulgaria into three parts: Macedonia in the South, which was left in Turkish barbarism; in the

North the mutilated Principality of Bulgaria, which was declared independent under the vague suzerainty of the Sultan, and the strip of intermediary land, for which a new designation had to be invented, East Roumelia, and which was to enjoy an administrative autonomy under the political sovereignty of the Porte.

From that day dates the Bulgarian irredentism, and the impatience with which for 44 years France and Alsace-Lorraine have stood with outstretched hands towards each other, gives you but a faint idea of the irresistible impulse of these three parts, violently and artificially separated, to be reunited now, as they had been in the glorious days of the Tsars Samuel, Kaloyan and Assen. East Roumelia was absorbed in 1885 in the Principality; but Macedonia remained. It may be said that the thought of this complete union has never for a moment ceased to inspire the Bulgarian mind and that it has dominated all its national life. Bulgaria was bidding the favorable time.

Awaiting this time, let us see how this new-born people is organized. We shall witness the most wonderful, the most original, I would be tempted to say, if it did not concern an enemy, the most touching scene in history; it is the rise in less than thirty years of a people, until then kept by their oppressors in the thickest barbarism, to a very advanced state of material civilization, and that in the midst of thousand obstacles, thousand outward difficulties, thousand internal convulsions, under the impulse of an indomitable patriotism.

In order to measure the power of this effort, we must get an idea of the situation Bulgaria was in at the time of her emancipation. The other nations subjected to the Ottoman yoke since the time of Mohammed II — Roumania, Serbia, Greece, were kept all this time, by one of their frontiers, in contact with the civilized world. It was not so

with Bulgaria! Surrounded on all sides by Turkish vilajets, she was more narrowly walled up, more rigorously separated from the world than the barons of the Middle Ages shut up in their castles. Just fancy a great Auvergne surrounded by an impregnable wall at the time of Jeanne d'Arc, waking up in the XIXth century, having everything to learn, everything to do, in order to catch up with her neighbors and her rivals, and succeeding to do this by a conscious and a gigantic volitional effort, wasting neither time nor energy. This is the scene which Europe has been witnessing (very distractedly it must be said) from 1880 to 1910.

Time does not permit me to go all over the stages of this rapid growth, of which I will give you but a faint idea, when I say, that the foreign trade between 1877 and 1912 went up from 53 millions to 383 millions of francs, the annual budget from 20 to 250 millions, the population from 3,500,000 to more than 5,000,000. Let us try, however, to get a general idea of the national life, and, *pour rendre a tout seigneur tout honneur* — to do the right thing by everybody — as Bulgaria is, above all, a rural democracy, let us pay a visit to the peasant.

Let us direct our steps to yonder village, which one rather guesses, than sees, almost hidden by tall trees, at the foot of a hill, some distance from the high road (an old habit contracted in Turkish time, in order to avoid the lodging of troops), with its low houses, its tiled roofs, under the eaves of which hang strings of red peppers and corn garlands. No sign of any luxury. The streets paved partly with cobble stones wind in a zig-zag way through the fences enclosing the dwelling houses. In this enclosure where one is received by the barking of dogs and the grunting of pigs, around a yard planted with fruit trees, are grouped: the

oven, the wine press, the stable, the hay stack, the wood pile and the dwelling house, the ground floor of which is hardened mud, the doors badly hinged in which there often is a single room serving as kitchen, dining room and sleeping room. On the wall hang household utensils; on the hearth simmers the kettle; in one corner of the room is spread the woolen carpet on which in the evening the peasants lie down without undressing. All the household furniture consists of a rude table, wooden benches used for chairs; an *icon* is seen in one of the corners towards the east. Be not, however, too ready to conclude that this nudity means privation, but rather see in this, as in the simple meal consisting of pepper — corns and black bread, nothing but voluntary frugality and a strong predisposition to economy. This same peasant who in his hut has neither a comfortable chair to rest, nor a bed to sleep on, has invested in the Agricultural Bank a pretty good sum of money, which increases year by year, with which money he will be able some day to enlarge his barn and to round out his field. Thrift and economy are the peasants' luxury. That is a new luxury. In Turkish times the fisc and the *aga* were ever on the alert ready to pounce upon the wealthy peasant. To-day he can treasure up — and readily does he avail himself of every opportunity to do so.

The first result of this simple rural régime is that the peasant has no dread of a large family. Every birth making an addition to a family, the support of which is not costly, brings (wether boy or girl) a pair of strong arms for field labor, which is done in common by the whole family under the undisputed authority of the father and the household management of the mother, a stanch matron, who does not shrink from the hardest work. It is not a rare thing to see families of 10-12 children and even more than that. Out of 700,000 households 435,660 count more than five members,

and the census taken every five years shows an increase of ten per cent in the population.

This peasant, so hard on himself, is a master in his own home. This fact is the dominating feature distinguishing all the national economy. Property is extremely broken up. The land belongs to an immense majority of petty landowners, possessing at the most from 5 to 6 hectares; often much less than that. The field belongs to him who cultivates it. This tiller of the soil, master in his home, has no master above him. When he is asked to shoulder the gun, he does it gladly, for he knows that he goes to defend his own field.

If, from the village, we pass to the town, we will find there, under different aspects, the same tendency to a necessarily restricted life. We find this at the employee's, out of respect for his superiors and from ancestral tradition perhaps, we see the same thing at the lawyer's, the physician's, the merchant's who do not show they are wealthy, when they really are, which is rather rare, just as with us people strive to conceal their poverty. There are no heirs of large fortunes in Bulgaria. People are rather inclined to hide their life than to make any display of it. The profession of „high life“ is unknown.

There is one item of expense about which the Bulgarian citizen is very generous, and that is the expense for the education of children and young people. The most modest families make great sacrifices in order to enable their sons to get the degrees of doctor of medicine, of laws, or of science from the universities of Paris, Montpellier, Vienna, or Berlin. This is because in this uniformly poor democracy, where according to Montequieu's formula, absolute equality is realized by general frugality, the only way for an ambitious young man to rise above his fellow-citizens is to develop

his intelligence, his talents, his personal worth. Thus, Bulgarian students are seen pursuing their studies with great zeal, without going into theoretic speculations or side investigations and specializing themselves in some profitable branch. In the dwelling of the modest workman, as in the peasant's hut man here lives with an effort slowly, inelegantly, if you wish, but constantly directed towards some practical utility.

So much for the workman; now let us look at the material.

I shall not be telling you anything new, when I say that Bulgaria, thanks to the fertility of her soil, derives from agriculture her principal, if not her only resources. On the good or bad crops depends the fortune of the year, not only for the rural population, but, by way of reflection and incidence, for everybody. So, one sees, the moment wheat begins to sprout, the anxiety with which enquiries are made in the street, in the cafés, in the banks, in regard to the prospects for a good harvest, which largely determines the course of exchange; all other thoughts are left for a time. Many a time have the ancient Bulgarian tsars with their mighty armies battered the walls of Tsarigrad (otherwise Byzantium). Then just as they were about to capture the city, all of a sudden, and without any apparent military reason, they would disband and return to their homes. That was because the harvest season had come, and if they failed to gather the harvest in season, all the treasures of Porphyrogenitus could not save the country from famine. It is on this phenomenon that Turkish diplomacy counted, when at the London Conference it dragged the negotiations, hoping the Bulgarian soldier would forcibly insist on returning to his field. But this time diplomacy was baffled in its calculations by the patriotism of the women, and the brave Bulgarian domakinya (house-keeper) was able to gather the harvest as she had sown it. Who could have told me, as I followed with a sympathetic eye those women

and those old men pushing the plough drawn by oxen which a boy was goading on, while a sickly looking man, limping behind throws the grain in the furrows, that three years later, I would see the very same thing in my own country, and that these French ploughmen, absent from their homes, (*pererratis amborum finibus*) would be found facing each other each in his trench?

But let us not anticipate!

This importance of agriculture could not escape the attention of the legislator. He has neglected nothing to develop it and to give satisfaction to the rural masses, who are at the same time the electoral masses. He has always been careful not to increase the land tax, and has always resorted to the indirect taxes to meet the increasing expenses of the budget. He has granted immunities to the man who would drain a new plot of land, he has given great inducements to mills manufacturing on the spot agricultural products, he has opened agricultural schools and nursery-gardens; he has even instituted, in each regiment, practical courses in which every soldier may learn precious lessons which he will carry back to his village. Finally, thanks to the Agricultural banks, the Bulgarian peasant has been enjoying for a long time the benefit of rural credit, which our peasant is still waiting for. You see there is no country so free from rural crises. Let us add that Bulgaria has no reason to dread the danger of overproduction for she only exports foodstuffs which command a ready salebread, meat and eggs.

As I have already spoken of agricultural banks, I would like to dwell more at length here on this original institution. It goes back to the time of Midhat Pasha, the only Turkish governor who took an interest in the people he governed, and who had, at length, to atone in exile for his liberal

views. The way he managed this matter reveals a singular mixture of principles of political economy derived from the West and the peculiar Turkish procedure derived from the East. An initial capital had to be created, which might be loaned to the peasant. What would a French economist have done? He would, of course, have demanded a subvention of the Etat-Providence. Here Midhat Pasha simply forced the peasants of each village to work in common a certain patch of communal land; a part of the produce was sold for the benefit of the bank and formed its endowment, the other part deposited in the communal granary served as reserve seed for unproductive years. With the capital thus formed, the agricultural bank advanced money to the peasant on pledge or on security and at what was then considered moderate interest 8 per cent. In this way the Bulgarian farmer was able to escape from the extortion of usurers. To-day the Bulgarian Agricultural Bank which has taken the place of the Turkish bank is not confined to loans at 7 or 8 per cent. It furnishes at cost price agricultural machines and implements, sprinkling pumps for vineyards, grapevines, silk-worm seed. The annual operations of the Agricultural Bank amount to 2 milliards of francs, giving a profit of 3,500,000 francs which is added to the capital. The Bank has encouraged the creation of more than 300 Mutual Aid Societies. It receives in deposit individual savings which keeps constantly increasing and amount to over 40 francs per inhabitant.

Industry is in a less favorable condition than agriculture. Coal, minerals and workmen are rare. Capital is also rare. To get them, recourse must be had to foreign finance, and to this the jealous xenophobia of the Bulgarian is invariably averse, for the Bulgarian money earned in Bulgaria, that does not go directly in his pocket, is stolen money. The few mills that have been installed in Bulgaria have great

difficulties in getting workmen. Not to speak of specialists who must be called from abroad at great expense, the tiller of the soil does not readily leave his field, which feeds him at the cost of persistent hard work, for the inexorable labor and servitude of the mills.

As for the ordinary trades, the Bulgarian, who is not an artisan, does not excel in them. And then, here too, capital is wanting. It is not a rare thing for a joiner on getting an order for a table or a bed to ask you for an advance in order to get the wood he needs.

So the country remains tributary, or it were, to the foreigners, for almost all manufactured articles. In this importation, I regret to say, that France occupied the sixth place. It is not surprising that Bulgaria, an economical and poor country applies more readily for cheap manufactured goods; but it is discouraging to find that even for articles which count as our direct specialties we are outstripped by our rivals. Let us take, for instance linenware, corsets and cravates; of these we sell for 32,000 francs. For how much do you think Austria furnishes the same goods? 663,000 francs!

If, from workshop, we pass to the school, there too, we shall find a proof of the purely democratic character of institutions. The Constitution states that primary instruction is obligatory and gratuitous. Every village is obliged to have its own school. School attendance is obligatory for both sexes from 6 to 12 years of age, under severe penalties. There is now in Bulgaria on an average one school for 880 inhabitants.

Secondary instruction is given in 198 schools to 16,000 boys and 10,000 girls. Finally, the capital Sofia has a university, where history, law, philosophy, philology and higher mathematics are taught to more than a thousand gentlemen and lady students.

I must say a word about the Bulgarian army, that army which is now arrayed against us owing to the most paradoxical complication and the most glaring blunder of a time so fraught with strange incidents. Recruited by means of personal obligatory and universal service, the army has an *effective* of 50,000 men in time of peace, of 190,000 with the reserves and 350,000 men in time of war, when all men fit for service are called under the colors from 20 to 45 years of age. At the time of the Balkan war, people were able to judge of the worth of the Bulgarian soldier, his endurance under privations, his intrepidity under the knife of the surgeon. The armed peasant defends — or thinks he defends his field.

After the Berlin Treaty, Bulgaria was only a political atom organized in great Europe, when a man of genius who was called Stambouloff, understood the importance that her position on the map would give to Bulgaria. She is, in effect, at the crossing point of the highroads in the East. Should the Germans wish to go to Bagdad, or the Austrian try to slip into Salinica; should the Russian try to reach the Bosphorus — they must all pass through Bulgaria and secure the consent of the Bulgarian. As far as the Turk is concerned, he knows that his former vassal keeps the keys of his house and can deliver them to him who will venture to enter it. So every one of these has an interest to be in good terms with the Bulgarian, not to allow him to be captured by his rivals.

Physically, the Bulgarian is rather small than big. He has large shoulders, powerful build, strong muscles, hair generally brown, thick beard, black eyes slightly curbed, saliant cheek-bone, strong jaw-bone, sharp features; his whole person gives the impression of robustness and solidity; excellent pedestrian, indefatigable mountaineer, he is the type of a short thick-set athletes.

The Bulgarian has a cult, an ardent, positive cult to which he is ready to sacrifice everything. And the object of this cult is Bulgaria, greater, richer, more prosperous Bulgaria, which he makes the centre of the world. Yes! to-day we understand and we know this love of country! The latent love which we cherished for our country has been revealed to us in distress. Well now, this state of effervescence in which we live in these tragic hours is for Bulgaria the normal state from birth till death. It is the very sap of the country which courses, as it were, in everybody's veins. All the altruistic faculties of the Bulgarian are concentrated on one sole object. He embraces his country as the believer embraces the cross. That is his peculiar mysticism!

Now this patriotic enthusiasm has one concrete, definite object, proclaimed since the emancipation of Bulgaria in 1878, constantly re-echoed ever since the spoliation of the Berlin Treaty, namely: to recover the Bulgarian part of Macedonia from the mouth of the Maritza to Bitolia. And now imagine the despair of the people: this object the Bulgarian attained at the price of his blood in 1913. He drove out the Turks. He let his horses drink of the water of the Vardar. He entered Seres which is his Mulhausen! He entered Drama which was his Strassburg! He entered Salonica which was his Metz! And then as a result of a mean aggression of his transdanubian neighbors, he lost everything and the treaty of Bucharest renewed the iniquity of Berlin.

This treaty the Bulgarian never accepted in his inmost soul, no more than we accepted the treaty of Frankfurt; he swore that he would go with him who would tear it up.

Ah! how he wished we might be that people! And how easy it would have been, if we had known how to speak and act in time in order to draw to us the Bulgarian people, all the scholars of whom speak our language, and

their army, who were taught by our officers to manage the Creusot canons, which we sold to them. But we failed to do all that. And now justice requires that we secure to Bulgaria these very territories which in their secret conventions in 1912, their allies acknowledged to belong to them. To this solution the Entente will have to come, because it is right, it is logical, it is the normal and unalterable application of the principle of nationalities, for which we are fighting. Woe to us! Woe to our descendants, if under the walls of the European fortress, we are to erect to-morrow, was buried one Bulgarian desire. Be sure the Bulgarian would blow up that fortress.
